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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [PTER](#) [TSPL](#) [ETTC](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: BIOSECURITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM: SUPPORT FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA CONTROL IN PAKISTAN

Ref: A. 07 Islamabad 5349

[1](#)B. Islamabad 580

[1](#)C. Islamabad 581

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Avian influenza (AI) and the threat of pandemic influenza continue to be key issues in Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) discussions with Pakistani health and agricultural officials. Continued AI outbreaks in poultry as well as a confirmed human case in late 2007, have sparked Government of Pakistan (GOP) interest in strengthening basic laboratory safety and security in research and diagnostic labs, as well as frontline clinics and hospitals. Basic support to these provincial laboratories represents a low cost, high impact opportunity to engage scientists in remote areas of Pakistan as well as improve basic biosecurity practices in at-risk laboratories. This cable is the third in a series of five outlining BEP progress in Pakistan. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Avian influenza has become a common area of BEP assistance with activities implemented by partner agencies in the U.S., including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Globally, BEP programs assist in disease surveillance, molecular diagnostics, lab capacity building and biosafety.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Pakistan Agricultural Research Center (PARC) and the Pakistan National Institutes of Health (NIH) are BEP collaborators and work with USDA/ARS, CDC and Sandia National Labs. PARC has begun to develop collaborative projects on a range of infectious diseases, including foot and mouth disease, and the NIH and CDC are implementing a Field Epidemiological and Laboratory Training Program (FELTP) with USAID funding. Additional BEP assistance will focus on the safe handling of highly pathogenic avian influenza, which is currently being isolated at PARC under less-than-ideal biosafety conditions. Both PARC and NIH plan to construct biosafety level 3 laboratory facilities for AI research later this year. BEP has established dedicated training opportunities for Pakistani scientists with USDA/ARS beginning in summer 2008, including both short and long term diagnostic training.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Continued AI outbreaks in poultry and a confirmed human case in late 2007 (reftel A) have catalyzed the GOP's concern over the spread of the virus. Dr. Nasir Shah, Director of the Veterinary Research Institute (VRI) in Peshawar, cited improper decontamination of AI poultry sites as one of the biggest impediments to preventing the spread of the virus. Shah highlighted the need for greater

public awareness and requested BEP support for training sessions and public outreach.

15. (SBU) BEP and EconOffs visited the VRI on February 7 to discuss the state of the North West Frontier Province's (NWFP) diagnostic laboratories and solicit input for future biosecurity assistance. Frontline animal and human health centers, including the VRI, are often the first responders to suspected outbreaks. Dr. Shah emphasized that VRI's limited funding is dedicated almost entirely to salaries and institute operations. Little to no funding is allocated to disease research. Following his attendance at the American Biological Safety Conference in 2007, Shah designated biosafety officers in all four regional labs under the VRI's authority (Saidu Shrif Sawat, Kohat, D.I.Khan and Abbotabad). Despite poor conditions, the lab was generating vaccines for highly pathogenic avian influenza, anthrax, foot and mouth disease and Newcastle virus.

16. (SBU) BEP officers met with visiting USAID infectious diseases advisor Andrew Clements on harmonizing BEP assistance with ongoing USAID efforts. BEP identified several areas of mutually supportive collaboration, including joint Pakistan-Afghanistan trainings and disease surveillance information exchanges. BEP assistance is being developed to complement USDA and USAID efforts in the region, and all BEP assistance related to AI is coordinated with relevant Embassy agencies.

17. (SBU) Comment: BEP assistance to Pakistan, most notably laboratory biosafety, complements regional efforts currently underway to combat avian influenza. Following the confirmed human case in 2007, GOP awareness has been significantly heightened with regard to the threat of pandemic influenza and the need to enhance AI control procedures. BEP engagement with frontline public health and agricultural workers, particularly in more remote regions of

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Pakistan, is essential, and will complement existing USAID efforts to enhance rural disease surveillance. End Comment.

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